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From the People's Party to President Trump: Populism in the U.S.

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Abstract

The emergence of two populist presidential candidates within *both* political parties during the 2016 election cycle sent shockwaves throughout America. Populism, presented as highly foreign to the American political system by media outlets and political commentators, is increasingly received with fear and hostility; however, Americans fail to recognize the existence of a uniquely American brand of populism that consists of ephemeral actors and lasting consequences. Through a cumulative study of populist actors and their respective movements from the Populist Party of the 1890s to George Wallace's American Independent Party of the 1960s and 1970s, this paper aims to identify two components of American populism that accent 2016's populist platforms and to recognize populism as a complex phenomenon within the American political system. American populists engage, in varying capacities, appeals to both collective economic rights and popular prejudices.

Introduction

With headlines ranging from "Trump's Rise Proves Populism Is Democracy's Greatest Threat" to "Populism is no way to govern, and Trump is proving it," media sources at both ends of the political spectrum have consistently condemned the concept of populism. [1] Populism is invariably assumed to be a derisive and volatile force that could uproot the foundational principles of America.[2] The election of Donald Trump and the entrance of Senator Bernie Sanders into the 2016 Democratic primary election marked the reemergence of populist actors in American politics. Presenting populism as a political phenomenon that only President Andrew Jackson truly embodied, the media fails to recognize the number of historical instances of American populism within just the past century. Even worse, the partisan presentation of populism as solely rooted in conservatism obscures how the demands of a populist base may benefit the liberal establishment. Partisan rhetoric that attaches populism to conservatism ignores the potential pitfalls of left-wing populism and how populist movements (from the left and right) contribute to the political environment and practices of today. Curious about the true impact of populism upon the American political system, I decided to investigate what impact populism has had on American politics in the past.[3]

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[1] See Evan McMullin, "Trump's Rise Proves Populism Is Democracy's Greatest Threat." NBCNews.com. October 13, 2017; Jennifer Rubin, "Populism is no way to govern, and Trump is proving it." The Washington Post. January 19, 2018.

[2] See McMullin, "Trump's Rise Proves Populism Is Democracy's Greatest Threat."; Rubin, "Populism is no way to govern, and Trump is proving it."; Robert Shrum, "Donald Trump Is Not a Populist." POLITICO Magazine. August 29, 2017.; Henry Olsen, "Whatever Happened to Trump's Populist Agenda?" The New York Times. November 20, 2017.; Reihan Salam, "Inflationary Populism Is Trump's Path Forward." The Atlantic. February 09, 2018.

[3] It would be remiss of me to not give thanks to the absolutely invaluable support and guidance of Professor Jennifer Delton during this thesis project. Without her patience and critical feedback throughout this process, I would truly would have been overwhelmed by the immensity of information before me.

The historiography of American populism is grounded in debates concerning the merit and goals of populist movements and figures. Charles E. Beard, a renowned early twentieth century historian, positioned the agrarian movements of the 1890s as collectivist political movements that reflected the capabilities of a vibrant democracy. Perceiving Populists as greedy individualists, Richard Hofstadter, a mentee of Beard, directly challenged Beard's interpretation in *The Age of Reform*. Hofstadter highlights the anti-Semitic rhetoric of populists, the antiquated vision of an agrarian myth and the centrality of economic concerns within the Populist Party to present this movement as subversive and its participants as self-interested. In *The Paranoid Style in American Politics,* he views the conspiratorial language and key themes of populist actors as located within a "paranoid style" that preys upon the American public's anxieties. In contrast to Hofstadter and in agreement with Beard, Lawrence Goodwyn celebrates the Populist movement as a truly democratic and collectivist movement that challenged establishment politics and expanded the range of appeals for politicians to consider entering the twentieth century.

Most recently, Michael Kazin's *The Populist Persuasion* provides an exhaustive and digestible account of populism that attempts to remedy the perspectives of Hofstadter and Goodwyn. In a revised interpretation of populism released just prior to the 2016 election, Kazin identifies two strains of populism consistently active within the American political system. Both types of populism combat against corporate elites and the political establishment, but the populist's conception of "the people" differ in each strand. One derives its strength from an embrace of class-based inequalities – fostered by an avoidance of "identifying themselves as supporters or opponents of any particular ethnic group or religion.[4] The other relies upon a

[4] Michael Kazin, "Trump and American Populism: Old Whine, New Bottles." *Foreign Affairs,* 95 (2016), 1.

narrower, ethnically restrictive voter base that is not necessarily divided by class difference.[5] Kazin asserts this populist base is "held together by common blood and skin color and by an inherited fitness for self-government" that ultimately develops into a "racial nationalism."[6] Through my cumulative study, I offer a nuanced interpretation of Kazin's conclusions that situates American populism as a political discourse that engages, in varying degrees, expressions of collective economic rights and popular prejudices. I will also consider how American populism both affirms and challenges the strength of democratic institutions and principles.

Similar to the structure of Kazin's *The Populist Persuasion,* this paper will investigate American populism through several case studies. Beginning in the 1890s, the electoral ambitions and rhetoric of the People's Party will be discussed. Next, the ephemeral political careers of Louisiana's authoritarian leader, Huey Long, and Father Charles Coughlin, a Catholic priest who commanded a massive radio audience, will demonstrate the power of populist messaging during the 1930s. Entering the second half of the twentieth century, the cases of Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy and Alabaman Governor George Wallace offer insight into the swelling role of popular prejudice in American politics. Finally, I will interpret the populist platforms and political actions of Senator Sanders and President Trump with reference to these past episodes of American populism.

Understanding the "Collective"

Before discussing the intricacies of populism in the US, the conception of "the people" or "the collective" must be addressed within the context of U.S. race relations. Drawing from

[5] Ibid., 2.
[6] Ibid., 2.

Cowie's *The Great Exception*, the term "collective economic citizenship" is the foundation of American populism due to its centrality in the populist appeals of the twentieth century.[7] Economic citizenship refers to a range of economic rights and freedoms secured through New Deal reforms. Cowie does not explicitly attach this concept to populism, but rather positions it as an ever-present force that is at the heart of New Deal era reform and of the white working class. Populist appeals became more closely attached to whites, specifically working class whites. Cowie refers to "the ascent of monolithic whiteness" that "engender[ed] more of a sense of unity among working people" during an era of restricted immigration (1923-1965).[8] The economic citizenship of working class whites is challenged by "those left out of the original New Deal package, women and minorities," who sought "their citizenship outside of the realm of collective economic rights."[9] This consistent tension between these two groups grows far more apparent in the 2016 election.

As highlighted by Kazin, Populists of the 1890s constructed a democratic vision that "rarely extended across the color line."[10] The People's Party and other populist movements of the first half of the twentieth century sought support from blacks solely out of political necessity, yet black activists rarely participated in the "avowedly white affair" that is American populism.[11] Populists of the 1890s and 1930s tended to avoid questions concerning race, even though the economic interests of poor, rural whites often aligned with those of black farmers and tenants.[12]

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[7] Jefferson Cowie, *The Great Exception: The New Deal & The Limits of American Politics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016. 24.
[8] Cowie, 20.
[9] Cowie, 28.
[10] Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1995. 14.
[11] Ibid., 14-15.
[12] See Ibid., 40: Black farmers and tenants, over 90% of whom lived in the South, would have been useful allies for Populists and Louisiana's Huey Long; however, neither group wished to

The Jim Crow era legislation and the poll tax significantly impacted the political viability of blacks to these fragile populist movements, while white Populists and Democrats commonly held "the era's dogma about the desirability of Caucasian supremacy."[13] Legal barriers, voter intimidation, and lynchings all contributed to the marginalization of blacks within both the 1890s and 1930s.

The prevailing belief of a gross concentration of wealth in the country and the degree of rhetorical engagement with a cultural/ethnic identity or set of anxieties are consistent features of a populist campaign. Each of these conditions appear in not only the *economic* motivations of populist supporters, but also in the *political* strategy of both American populists and their establishment opponents. Xenophobic and racist attitudes receive a level of legitimacy within the eyes of the electorate because of the belief that "what is 'popular' must also be good or true."[14] The selection and presentation of prejudice as a feature of American populism gains greater traction during the second half of the twentieth century. The usage and acceptability of popular prejudices constrains and ultimately defines the "collective" within the eyes of the populist.

The People's Party: Political Maneuvering and Fragmentation in the 1890s

Lawrence Goodwyn situates the ideological core of the People's Party, the Omaha Platform, as a culmination of past agrarian efforts from the 1880s.[15] However, Populists Tom

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directly engage issues of race. Long, in particular, consistently evaded questions concerning the education of and the redistribution of wealth to blacks.

[13] Ibid., 40.

[14] McMullin, "Trump's Rise Proves Populism Is Democracy's Greatest Threat."

[15] See Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion*, 29: Central to Populist ideology prior to the fusion of the party's ticket with the Democrats, the Omaha Platform called for a range of social and economic reforms to improve the well-being of rural and agrarian populations. Written by lecturer Ignatius Donnelly in 1892, the Omaha Platform sought to establish a direct election of senators (at the time, state legislatures voted), restrict the farmer's work day to eight hours, and institute a federal loans system. In retrospect, the Populist cause was both radical and conservative.

Watson and William Jennings Bryan tied the Populist cause to the very founding of the country and to democratic heroes (i.e. Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson). Watson presented Alexander Hamilton's vision of a strong central government (coined as "the System") as an instrument of "a moneyed aristocracy supported by special privilege" that Jefferson and his disciples successfully combated.[16] After the Civil War, Watson contends that these aristocratic forces in American society seized the Republican Party, while the Democratic Party became prey to the "Boodlers, Monopolists, Gamblers, Gigantic Corporations, Bondholders, [and] Bankers."[17] Watson's construction of America's political history constantly emphasizes the purity of the will of the people and individual enterprise.

Using this rhetorical method, Bryan elevates the role of the farmer as "a very special creature, blessed by God, and… the voice of democracy and of virtue."[18] The inclusion of God and other religious imagery, such as in Bryan's "Cross of Gold" speech, is a consistent feature of American populism. Kazin identifies "two different but not exclusive strains of vision and protest" that supplement this religious Populist rhetoric: pietistic impulses and the secular faith of the Enlightenment.[19] By pietistic impulses, Kazin suggests that, within these predominantly Christian, rural communities, individuals feel a duty to "attack sinful behavior, especially when it received encouragement and sanction from the rich."[20] The secular faith of the Enlightenment

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[16] Ibid., 10.
[17] Ibid., 10.
[18] Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform*. New York, NY: Vintage, 1960, 35.
[19] Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion*, 11; These two currents in populist rhetoric remain active in the 1930s. Attracting similar regional bodies and socio-economic classes, Long and Coughlin employed these rhetorical strategies to consider *economic* issues within the country. The increasing vagueness of Christian imagery in populist rhetoric, during the latter half of the twentieth century, reflects the emergence of a Judeo-Christian tradition and the rise of secular attitudes within the American people.
[20] Ibid., 11.

complements these pietistic motivations and expands the appeal of the Populist message to what Kazin terms as rationalist actors. The belief that "ordinary people could think and act rationally" constituted the secular faith aspect of Populist rhetoric.[21] Rationalists considered "words like *Judas*, *sin*, and *redemption*" as metaphors that bolstered the emotional weight of their argument rather than an explicit appeal to their faith.[22] Bryan, known as the "Great Commoner," demonstrated immense political skill by connecting with both Populists and Democrats through his powerful oratory skills. For example, Bryan charged,

> "Burn down your cities and leave our farms, and your cities will spring up again as if by magic; but destroy our farms and the grass will grow in the streets of every city in the country."[23]

Through these religious and rational appeals, Populists sought to stress the economic issues of the day. Urban life is depicted as corrosive to the human spirit, thus immediately fostering a regional attitude and focus within the Populist movement.

Populists often used anti-Semitic language to describe urbanites, who became inextricably attached to the banker community. This usage of popular prejudice will carry through to the 1930s. Watson, in particular, railed against the "red-eyed Jewish millionaires" and "international gold ring" of Wall Street.[24] As we will see with Father Coughlin and McCarthy, American populists tend to deteriorate in the quality and popular appeal of their rhetoric. Watson is no different. Although there were indications that he held deep racial and nativist prejudices early on in his career, Watson "risked the ire of Democratic mobs when he shared speaking

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[21] Ibid., 11.
[22] Ibid., 12.
[23] Ibid., 44.
[24] See Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion*, 10.; Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform*, 78-79.

platforms with black Populists and derided his opponents' manipulation of race."[25] In addition, Watson sought to reconcile whites and blacks under the same Populist banner. He framed his appeal as:

> "You are kept apart that you may be separately fleeced of your earnings. You are made to hate each other because upon that hatred is rested the keystone of the arch of financial despotism which enslaves you both. You are deceived and blinded that you may not see how this race antagonism perpetuates a monetary system which beggars both."[26]

According to C. Vann Woodward, statements such as this fostered a belief among white Southern Democrats that blacks could potentially act as political allies, rather than Republican adversaries.[27] However, Watson eventually "became a violently outspoken white supremacist, anti-Semite, and defender of the Republic against the papal menace" out of deep-seated frustration with the failures of the Populist movement after the 1908 presidential election – he was the last presidential candidate of the People's Party.[28] Watson embodies the immense complexity of the American populist. With Populist actors like Watson in mind, Hofstadter emphasizes the anti-Semitic tradition engrained in not only the People's Party, but also other third party movements. He reasons this is due to the susceptibility of a third party's audience who "feel themselves completely deprived of self-defense and subjected to unlimited

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[25] Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion*, 41; Despite these actions, Watson was a vehement opponent of federal intervention to protect black voters and endorsed the Jim Crow laws that Populist and Democratic legislatures alike enacted in Georgia and other states.

[26] C. Vann Woodward, *Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel*. New, NY: Oxford University Press, 1963, 220.

[27] Woodward, 99-100, 220-221.

[28] Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America*, 325: It is worth noting that this is Goodwyn's sole mentioning of the prejudiced character of Watson. It appears in the "Afterword" of his book that celebrates the collectivist Populist movement as representative of the people. Unlike Kazin, Goodwyn does not necessarily address the cultural implications of the Populist movement upon minority groups.

manipulation by those who wield power."[29] Goodwyn is cognizant of this reality within the People's Party, but he tends to emphasize the Omaha Platform's reforms and Populist principles that expressed legitimate concern for the well-being of rural communities.

Despite invoking the names of small government advocates (Jefferson and Jackson), Watson and Bryan wished "to expand the power of the state only in order to restore the glories of an earlier day."[30] The Populist movement relied on this radical, yet conservative dynamic that attracted a range of supporters throughout the South and Midwest. Hofstadter perceives the usage of the agrarian myth (a conservative theme), the yeoman farmer characterized as the ideal man and ideal citizen, as vital ploy by Populist speakers to garner support among rural populations. By depicting this concept as consumed with vanity, Hofstadter presents the agrarian myth as:

> "the special virtues of the farmer and the special values of rural life was coupled with the assertion that agriculture, as a calling uniquely productive and uniquely, important to society, had a special right to the concern and protection of government."[31]

Hofstadter is correct in his assertion that self-interest was a feature of the People's Party, but he misplaces where this self-interest lies. Despite Populist gains in North Carolina and Alabama, the 1894 mid-term elections revealed the "absence of a potential Populist plurality in the West" and the centrality of the silver coinage issue to potential electoral success.[32] Marked by the rise of the so-called Silver Democrats, Democratic Party elites recognized that the splintering of interests within the party jeopardized the possibility of a presidential victory in 1896. This tumultuous period, just prior to the 1896 election, is precisely where Hofstadter's conception of self-interest

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[29] Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform*, 71.
[30] Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion,* 29.
[31] Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform*, 24.
[32] Goodwyn, 233.

truly breathes within the People's Party. Goodwyn recognizes a tension within the Populist movement just prior to the 1896 presidential election, in which the party's internal struggle "was a contest between a cooperating group of political office-seekers on the one hand and the Populist movement on the other."[33] Goodwyn contends that these office-seekers, labeled "fusionists," sought to advance their political careers at the cost of the Populist principles enumerated in the Omaha Platform, while the 'people' of the People's Party fell to the wayside.

The structural weakness of the Populist movement is that it conformed to a hierarchical, representative model that entrenched party elites into the organizational machinery of the Party.[34] Goodwyn notes that men who created the Farmers' Alliance-Populist union were "clearly outnumbered by aspiring Populist political brokers."[35] The abandonment of the Omaha Platform and the fusion of the Democratic and Populist tickets highlighted the regional and economic components of Populist support, while also signifying the strength of self-interested fusionists,. Hofstadter locates three "compact [*regional*] centers" of Populist support that pertained to a select product: the South, reliant upon cotton; the Northwestern states, dependent upon wheat; and the mountain states, concerned with silver.[36] The latter of the three provided to be the strategic good that determined the ultimate fusion of the Democratic and Populist tickets.[37] The eventual union of these parties during the 1896 election and the Republican Party's campaign strategy highlights this shift in power and principles within the People's Party, but more

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[33] Goodwyn, 231.
[34] See Goodwyn*,* 308; Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion,* 42.
[35] Goodwyn, 180.
[36] Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform*, 50.
[37] See Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform,* 50; Goodwyn, 233: Goodwyn notes that party enjoyed electoral support ranging from "25 to 45 per cent in nearly twenty-odd states." A clear indicator of Populist strength in the South, Watson's third party in Georgia secured 45% of the total state vote (primarily competing with Southern Democrats).

importantly, the impact of American populism *upon* the political establishment and future campaign practices.

With Bryan heading the fused ticket, Democratic and Populist speakers actively toured the country to spread the good news of free silver, but the optimism and momentum generated from Bryan's "Cross of Gold" speech was short-lived. Financial woes quickly plagued the Populist and Democratic arms of the campaign. The deplorable status of Bryan's war chest can be attributed to the economic status of his supporters, who tended to be rural, poor and working class citizens. Hofstadter notes that despite high membership rates with a low membership fee of five cents, Populist farmers consistently voided payments due to their level of poverty.[38] Furthermore, radical Populists, soured by the loss of the Omaha Platform, often incited unrest among Democratic supporters, thus further lessening potential donations to the campaign effort. The shortage of money resulted in the practice of recruiting self-supporting volunteers, while the Populist national campaign needed a loan from the Democratic National Committee to function until Election Day.[39] The Republican Party enjoyed a very different financial situation and campaign strategy.

Under the leadership of Republican National Committee Chairman and industrialist Mark Hanna, the Republicans operated a massive national campaign that catapulted William McKinley into office and set a standard for campaign strategy at the turn of the century. With the gold standard as central to his campaign platform, McKinley immediately distanced himself from the pleas for silver of the farmer and mining communities of the country. Consequently, McKinley received campaign contributions from "wealthy partisans" and "corporations, especially railroad

[38] Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform*, 102-103.
[39] Goodwyn, 278.

corporations" that often "exceeded the entire amount the Democrats raised in their national subscription drive."[40] Hanna exploited the economic interests invested in McKinley to create an aggressive campaign. Instead of combatting the economic-centered rhetoric of Bryan, Hanna painted the GOP's messaging in cultural terms. Through the distribution of millions of flags often at "flag days" honoring McKinley, Hanna attached the GOP presidential ticket to the country's founding in the minds of Americans. Goodwyn notes the effectiveness of this tactic:

> "Frustrated Democrats found it difficult to show proper respect for the national emblem without participating in some kind of public endorsement of McKinley. Inevitably, some Democrats tore down Republican banners – the American flag. Such actions did not hurt the Republican cause."[41]

In addition, McKinley secured the support of "almost every urban newspaper outside the South," while Hanna produced and distributed millions of pamphlets, broadsides, and booklets.[42] The well-financed and cleverly orchestrated campaign of Hanna and McKinley indicated not only the strength and creativity of GOP party elites and the business community, but also the lengths to which establishment powers will go to squash the People's Party.

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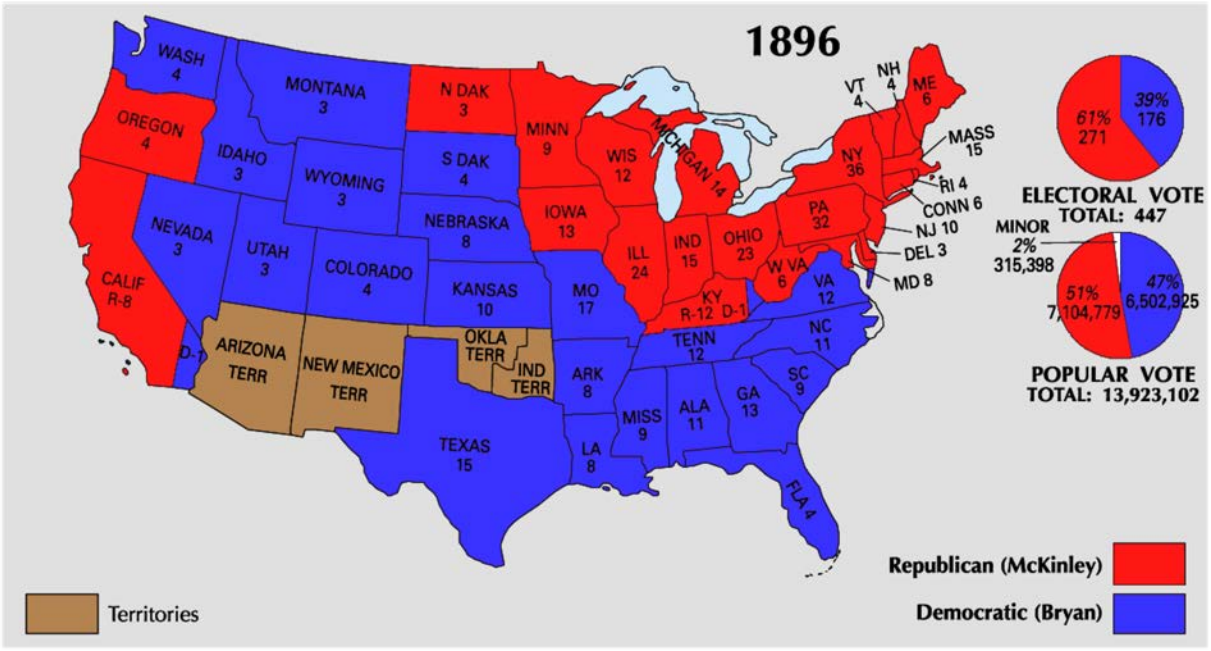
[40] Goodwyn, 279.
[41] Goodwyn, 281.
[42] See Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion*, 44; Goodwyn, 279.



Results of the Election of 1896

As the image above illustrates, Bryan failed to secure vital Western and Midwestern states – namely, California, Oregon, Iowa, Kentucky, Indiana, and Ohio. Upon investigating the voter data at the state level, the states of California, Oregon, and Kentucky all held margins of victory (in favor of McKinley) by no more than 2,000 votes, while the more so electorally valuable state of Indiana had difference of 20,000 votes between the tickets.[43] These differentials confirm the centrality of regionalism, as determined by economic identity/interest, that is characteristic of American populism's collective economic appeals. Populists failed to effectively connect with working class urbanites due to their inability to rhetorically link the struggles of noble farmer with that of the urban factory worker. The Populist pockets of farmers and miners, who littered the blue states and Midwest, contributed to a highly competitive election – despite the Democratic Party being outspent 5:1 by Hanna and company.[44] Similarly,

[43] Dave Leip, "1896 Presidential General Election Data - National." Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections. 2016.
[44] 270 To Win. "1896 Presidential Election." 270 To Win. 2004.

Goodwyn celebrates the "people's movement of mass democratic aspiration… [that] revealed in the capacity of those who had little, to empathize with those who had less."[45] Even, a cynic of this Populist movement, Hofstadter concedes, "the Populist movement, despite its defeat, activated a stream of agrarian organization and protest that subsequently carried point after point."[46]

Aside from the impact of the Populist-Democratic fusion upon campaign finance and strategy within the American political context, reforms outlined by the People's Party influenced numerous pieces of legislation throughout the 1900s and 1910s. Despite his qualms with Bryan and the Populist movement, Hofstadter notes that following Bryan's defeat to McKinley in 1896, "agriculture [made] the greatest gains it had ever made in the sphere of national legislation."[47] Hofstadter provides an exhaustive account of farm legislation reminiscent of old Populist proposals: the Hepburn Act (1906), the Pure Food and Drug Act (1906), the Meat Inspection Act (1907), the Smith-Lever Act (1914), the Federal Farm Loan Act (1916), the Warehouse Act (1916), the Grain Standards Act (1916), the Cotton Futures Act (1916), the Rural Post Roads Act (1916), and the Smith-Hughes Act (1917).[48] I apologize for this lengthy list, but it is necessary in illustrating the range of regulations and programs enacted following the demise of the People's Party. These substantive legislative victories contributed to the expansion of federal power and to the protection of farmer interests. The electoral failures of the People's Party can be attributed to their construction of the 'collective' within their greater struggle for economic rights. Cowie positions urban, working class urban whites as the mobilizers of collective economic demands

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[45] Goodwyn, 294.
[46] Goodwyn, 95.
[47] Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform*, 95.
[48] Alan Brinkley, *Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin, & the Great Depression*. New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1982, 118.

for reform during the 1930s; the Populist movement's inability to connect with these urbanites ultimately determined their gradual disintegration.[49]

Huey Long and Father Coughlin: Reckless Politics Leads to Expedited Ends in the 1930s

Unlike the Populist movement of the 1890s, the populist figures of the 1930s were not necessarily a product of past movements, but rather a manifestation of economic anxieties and ideological principles of the period. The two populists of concern for this section, Huey Long of Louisiana and Father Charles Coughlin of Michigan, exhibit Populist trends of regional followings, while also demonstrating a continued emphasis on economic issues. Rhetorical strategies of the People's Party and the Populist movement's impact on American democratic norms and institutions strongly parallels the careers of Long and Coughlin. However, Long and (to a lesser extent) Coughlin display a level of political sophistication in their populist calls for reform and modes of organization. I will first turn our attention to the Kingfish of Louisiana – Huey Long.

Exemplified by his first political office as a commissioner of the Railroad Commission, Long's will to serve the interests of the less fortunate and to closely study the state constitution's resulted in substantial reforms.[50] Long limited the powers of the utility companies, reduced rates, improved services, and tried to curb the influence of the oligarchical giant of the Standard Oil Company.[51] Long's previous work as an attorney provided him with the tools to dissect the

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[49] Cowie, 24-25.
[50] Brinkley, 18: The Railroad Commission was considered a state body for "aging incompetents biding their time until retirement." The state constitution gave broad powers over the rules and rates of railroads, pipelines, telephone and telegraph companies, and other utilities. Long rose to the position of chairman of the commission by 1922.
[51] Brinkley, 18.

state's constitution at each level of political office he occupied. Upon ascending to the governorship of Louisiana at the age of thirty-five in 1928, Long quickly established a system of patronage to "maximize the jobs and favors at his disposal" and consolidate "personal power over all levels of the state government."[52] Brinkley centers Long's patronage system as the cornerstone of his political machine. Controlling one's job security in both high-ranking cabinet positions or lowly civil servant opportunities, Long maintained loyalty throughout the state government's extremities.[53] In his first year as Governor, the Kingfish won approval for the provision of free textbooks to both private and public students, financed the construction of a network of paved highways, forced the piping of cheap natural gas into New Orleans, revised the state's severance tax to increase the burden of the wealthy and oil interests, and rolled back property taxes.[54] Long's highway program improved the state's "300 miles of paved roads and three… bridges" to "3,754 miles of paved highway, forty bridges, and almost 4,000 miles of new gravel farm road."[55] Brinkley begrudgingly admits,

> "Long expanded the state's abysmally inadequate public-health facilities, improved conditions for treatment of the mentally ill, founded a major medical school. He lavished money and attention upon Louisiana State University and helped transform a provincial college into a respectable major university… [H]e began night schools in an effort to

[52] Brinkley, 23-24.
[53] Brinkley, 26: Brinkley notes that this system of patronage not only impacted Long's opponents, but also these opponents' families and acquaintances. For example, a bridge tender lost his job when Huey "discovered he was a friend of a wealthy state senator who had turned against the Long organization."
[54] Brinkley, 24.
[55] Brinkley, 30.

> lower the state's appalling illiteracy rate; and for children, he supplied… state-supported school buses and new classroom facilities."[56]

Despite this laundry list of reforms, Long also facilitated a culture of corruption, subordination, and fear within Louisiana's political circles. Of particular note, Long instituted a "deduct box," an open system of monthly deductions from the salaries of state employees, to finance not only some of these programs, but also his political organization building, personal security, and patronage system.[57] Furthermore, his intrusion upon legislative meetings eroded the separation of powers and checks-and-balances of the state government. Instances of blind voting due to the rampant intimidation by Long resulted in unprecedented events within the legislature, such as the passage of "forty-four bills, introduced for the first time only the night before."[58] This control over Louisiana's state government is not entirely a product of the governor's enumerated powers, but rather Long's ability to secure a popular mandate to enact such reforms.

To understand the political rise of Huey Long, one must understand the complex political landscape of Louisiana. Brinkley presents the state of Louisiana as an outlier in relation to other Southern states in terms of the social norms, cultural relations, and political machines active within the state. Entering the twentieth century, Louisiana's political culture of "government by gentlemen" exhibited an expansion in the characteristics of its ruling oligarchy, in which "industrialists, railroad and utility magnates, and representatives of the fast-growing oil industry" joined their ranks.[59] Brinkley notes that this political establishment had to manage the same racial and class divisions (i.e. rural-urban tensions) that characterized much of the South, but

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[56] Brinkley, 30-31.
[57] Brinkley, 27.
[58] Brinkley, 28.
[59] Brinkley, 15.

"they had to deal as well with a fundamental cultural and religious schism: between the Catholics of French descent in the Delta region and the Protestant Anglo-Saxons of the north."[60] Cultural anxieties tended to determine the nature of political debate in the state, while poor blacks *and* whites were consistently disenfranchised by the ruling oligarchy. In addition, the city of New Orleans housed the South's sole, effectual political machine, the Old Regulars, which thrived through a system of corruption and philanthropy.[61] What is missing from this set of political conditions? The economic anxieties and pleas of poor and working-class Louisianans.

Long tapped into this voter demographic, both in rural communities and (to a lesser extent) urban areas, through his fiery rhetoric and constant opposition to wealthy elites. Oftentimes incorporating slogans and phrases of William Jennings Bryan, Long elevated the image of the independent farmer in a similar fashion. He described Louisiana's oligarchy and opposing forces as "thieves, bugs and lice."[62] Long's Bryan-inspired slogan, "Every Man a King, But No One Wears a Crown," dissolved the cultural divisions of the state and highlighted the poor economic conditions and opportunities within the state. Despite the religious divisions in the state, Long carefully crafted his speeches to refer to a Christian God in relation to questions of economics:

> "God invited us all to come and eat and drink all we wanted… God called: 'Come to my feast'… Rockefeller, Morgan, and their crowd stepped up and took enough for 120,000,000 people and left only enough for 5,000,000 for all the other 125,000,000 to

[60] Brinkley, 15.
[61] Brinkley, 15.
[62] Brinkley, 20.

> eat. And so many millions must go hungry and without these good things God gave us unless we call on them to put some of it back."[63]

Both Long and Coughlin tended to throw out exorbitant numbers to illustrate the severity of the concentration of wealth in country; the use of these 'statistics' attempted to instill legitimacy and authority to these passionate speakers.[64] Long's usage of great figures connects his message with that of the masses, in which the collective struggle of everyday Americans is presented as a result of the greedy few. In *The Great Exception*, Cowie emphasizes the rarity and significance of Roosevelt administration's reforms that *act upon* the collective economic demands of the American public.[65] Long and Coughlin's ability to tap into this collective economic narrative in both rural and urban communities indicates the power of this message. Use of phrases and symbols, such as 'Joe Worker' and the agrarian myth, connected with select audiences, while the idea of the local merchant held mass appeal. The plight of the local merchant acted as a central device to not only Long's rhetorical strategy, but also that of Coughlin.

Brinkley positions the local merchant as central to both rural and urban community life. For rural communities, the local merchant often acted as "crucial instrument of credit, a banker, a purchaser of farm produce; his store had been a gathering place, at times a community's only social center."[66] Local merchants in urban communities catered to "the tastes of particular racial or ethnic groups, to members of certain occupations, [and] to residents of homogeneous urban enclaves."[67] Although the dire economic conditions of the nation were certainly a factor, the impact of the Great Depression upon urban centers and other communal hubs eased the

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[63] Brinkley, 71-72.
[64] Brinkley, 72, 98.
[65] Cowie, 30.
[66] Brinkley, 146.
[67] Brinkley, 146.

digestibility of Long and Coughlin's message to urbanites in a manner that the Populists of the 1890s could not. The declining presence of the local merchant acted as an economic and social symbol that Americans, regardless of locale, could relate to. The impressive communications network of Huey Long requires attention in regards to retaining supporters both locally and nationally.

Similar to the impact of Mark Hanna upon campaign strategy practices, Long instituted an aggressive campaign that consisted of an administrative wing to "compile an extensive mailing list, make contacts, win allies – to establish the beginnings of a political organization."[68] Through the "heavy use of circulars and posters, harsh attacks on the opposition, [and] extensive travel through rural areas in an automobile," Long pursued rural voters and those discontent with the ruling oligarchy in Louisiana.[69] The literature distributed was often rife with inaccuracies and exaggerations that Louisiana's establishment press attempted to refute. To combat the "lying newspapers," Long created his own independent communications network.[70] Long used radio broadcast time to rail against political opponents, promote agrarian reforms, and to gain national attention; this technology also acted as an avenue to challenge Franklin Delano Roosevelt's administration. Roosevelt recognized, and even appreciated, the political ambition of Long. He regarded Long as "one of the two most dangerous men in the country."[71] Five days after Roosevelt's first "Fireside Chat," Long took to the air and immediately displayed his political deft and skillful use of the radio medium. Brinkley asserts,

[68] Brinkley, 18.
[69] Brinkley, 17.
[70] Brinkley, 26.
[71] Brinkley, 57.

> "With liberal use of passages from the bible and quotations from such popular American heroes as Daniel Webster, William Jennings Bryan, and Theodore Roosevelt, Long made his economic proposals sound simple, logical, and moderate. Even more impressive was his caginess in dealing with Roosevelt. There was no hint in this address of disillusionment with the Administration."[72]

Long wished to position himself as a friend and partner to Roosevelt and his administration's aims, while also presenting the concept of wealth redistribution as an "expectation of specific legislative action. [Long] was maneuvering Roosevelt into an awkward and profitless position."[73] Another component of Long's communications network, the *Louisiana Progress* newspaper (released in 1930) acted as an effective medium for Long to combat the local press. As Long turned his attention towards Washington, the *Louisiana Progress* was renamed the *American Progress* to speak to a national rather than regional audience, thus putting further pressure upon Roosevelt.[74] In exclusively Louisiana, Long also "built an expensive sound truck… [to] tour the state and speak to impromptu crowds."[75] Long's campaigning and eventual political organization set a standard for campaign management due to their immense success in entrenching Long into the hearts of *Louisianans*.[76]

These appeals to rural, agrarian communities and to working class Christians throughout the country, as shown in polling data, resulted in lasting outcomes in regards to Long's political

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[72] Brinkley, 62.
[73] Brinkley, 62: The concrete impact of Long's politics upon Roosevelt's administration will be examined later.
[74] Brinkley, 27, 70-71.
[75] Brinkley, 26.
[76] Regionalism rears its head once again in regards to Long's political legacy. His influence upon political norms and public confidence in state institutions within Louisiana is unmatched. Yet, Long polled his greatest support and most ardent followers from Louisiana's rural northern and central parishes.

legacy and Roosevelt's reforms. Even after his death and the exposure of widespread corruption within his administration, 55% of Louisiana voters "called Long a good influence on the state" in 1940, while a Louisiana newspaper "polled citizens asking them who had been the greatest governor in the history of the state, the vast majority chose Huey Long" in 1974.[77] Long's message demonstrated strong regional appeal in his first effort to secure the governorship of Louisiana, in which he "had carried twenty-eight parishes, more than either of his opponents; and he virtually swept the poor hill parishes of the north and central sections of the state."[78] These regional trends would continue to characterize Long's electoral campaigns, but his economic message would improve (as economic conditions worsened) in its receptiveness in urban and Southern areas of the state. As Brinkley states, "it no longer seemed to matter whether the parish was Protestant or Catholic, northern or southern. What mattered was its wealth, or lack of it."[79] However, Long's overwhelming majorities in rural parishes suggests the nature of his populism, at a national scale, would be far more agreeable to rural communities and interests. In a 1936 poll that presented its audience with a hypothetical presidential race between Roosevelt, an unnamed Republican, and Long, Huey secured nearly 11% of the vote.[80] Regionally, Long polled between ten and fifteen percent of the vote in all regions except New England and the mid-Atlantic states.[81] Although this poll suggested Long was not just a regional figure, it rather emphasizes the power of his *collective* economic message. Long pulls his strength from rural populations, while his Share Our Wealth Plan also connected with urban workers. Partisan

[77] Brinkley, 29-30.
[78] Brinkley, 19: Throughout his political career in Louisiana, Long struggled to penetrate the political machine of the Old Regulars and garner the support of New Orleans urbanites.
[79] Brinkley, 22.
[80] Brinkley, 207-208.
[81] Brinkley, 207-208.

identity is dissolved by positioning the economic struggles and needs of citizens as inextricably attached to the survival of American democracy. Therefore, his initial political rise, fueled by regional and economic discontent in Louisiana, blossomed into a national *economic* message that truly pressured Roosevelt's administration.

Alongside his confidant Gerald L. K. Smith, Long decided to establish a national network of political clubs called the Share Our Wealth Society in 1934. To opponents of Long, this move revealed his intention to potentially absorb the Democratic Party and develop a national following for an eventual run at the presidency. Smith, a pastor from Wisconsin, combined populist rhetoric with Christian evangelism to "awaken farmers, storekeepers, factory workers so effectively to their wants and their resentments."[82] Traveling primarily in Georgia and Atlanta, Smith moved from county to county, with Long's sound truck in tow, distributing and collecting membership applications.[83] Smith's zealous involvement in the Share Our Wealth Society reveals a prejudiced component of Long's otherwise color-blind populism.[84] Smith, a reoccurring character in America's populist narrative, tapped into racist and anti-Semitic sentiments during his travels. The reported success of his grassroots mobilization and his reputation as an effective speaker suggests that populism maintains an attachment to popular

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[82] Brinkley, 173: Long initially considered Smith as a useful tool of his political organization due to his magnetic personality, but Smith's admiration for Long soon evolved into an unhealthy obsession. Shortly before his death, Long wished to dissociate himself from Smith and instructed his bodyguards to keep Smith at a distance from himself.

[83] Brinkley, 173: Smith claimed that he was bringing in 20,000 new recruits a day and that the size of the Share Our Wealth Society exceeded five million members. As Brinkley notes, "no one could either verify or dispute his claims" due to the immense popularity of the movement throughout the South.

[84] Brinkley, 32-33: Long tended to avoid questions on race to maximize his national appeal, but he would use prejudice to advance certain political goals. To place select loyalists in elected positions, Long would prey upon racial prejudices by associating the opposition's candidate with black businesses and activists.

prejudices alongside these greater economic appeals. These Share Our Wealth Clubs tended to emerge directly out of local schools or churches that were already considered the hub of community life; however, the degree to which these clubs were politically active and responsive to Long's aims differed significantly from location to location. Outside of Louisiana, organizers often conflated (or even disregarded) the aims of Long with local politics and concerns, thus club meetings acted more so as town hall meetings to air personal grievances. While in Louisiana, these clubs "were the most tightly organized, the most carefully controlled from above, [and] the most responsive to Long's own wishes."[85] The regional appeal of Long's populism is especially clear in these clubs, in which Louisianan clubs tended to advance Long's political aims *within* the state rather than at the national level. However, the power of the Share Our Wealth Society should not be discounted.[86] The economic message of Long's platform was truly powerful; these clubs demonstrate the reach of his populist appeals.

As the Share Our Wealth Society grew in 1934, Roosevelt flirted with "the idea of sending federal troops intro Louisiana to 'restore Republican government' in the state," while the Justice Department and the FBI "drew up elaborate legal and tactical memoranda" for the potential plan.[87] Roosevelt decided to abandon this rather aggressive scheme and reconsidered his strategy in combatting the growing popularity of Long. Similar to Long's initial approach to Roosevelt's administration, Roosevelt recognized the power of co-opting his adversary. Brinkley suggests that Roosevelt's Second New Deal and his "turn to the left" in 1935 "was the result of

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[85] Brinkley, 180.
[86] Brinkley, 80-81: Brinkley suggests that although there were rumors of a potential 1936 presidential campaign in the works, Long would probably have waited till 1940 to challenge Roosevelt at the ballot box.
[87] Brinkley, 79-80.

many political considerations. There can be little doubt, however, that Long was one of them."[88] Roosevelt's acceptance of a Treasury Department proposal, known as the "Soak-the-Rich" tax bill, for sharply graduated increases in income- and inheritance-tax rates acted as a mechanism to co-opt followers of both Long and Coughlin. Additionally, the Social Security Act, the Wagner Act, and the Utilities Holding Company Act sought to take the wind out of Long and Coughlin's sails.[89] Each of these legislative actions, either explicitly or implicitly influenced by populist calls for reform, demonstrated the impact of populist actors upon a tumultuous period in the reorientation of governmental duties and control.

The developing political organization of Long threatened Roosevelt's power and questioned the administration's ties to 'special privileges,' while Long's rise to power in Louisiana revealed severe issues concerning the construction of the state constitution and its legal codes. Ultimately, Long's meteoric political career and subsequent assassination reveals how an undemocratic, authoritarian force, veiled in populism, strengthens the democratic values, institutions, and laws of the country at both the national and state level. Coughlin, on the other hand, is often more readily labeled as a populist by both scholars and media outlets alike. Although far less impactful upon the political establishment in contrast to Long, Coughlin's rise and fall on the national stage illuminates the trends of American populists and messaging that differentiates this era of populism from the populism of the latter half of the twentieth century.

Kazin incorporates Coughlin into a greater conversation concerning Christian radio priests and Catholic activists that reduced anti-Catholic prejudices in the country, while Brinkley suggests that Coughlin's explosive entrance into the arena of Depression era politics is due to his

[88] Brinkley, 80.
[89] Brinkley, 247.

"expectation of constant solicitude and approval" and the unique power of his rhetoric.[90] Both scholars cite the destitute state of the American economy as the grounds by which Coughlin could espouse his message. Coughlin's first radio broadcast was largely a result of the financial troubles of his parish. Despite displaying an entrepreneurial aptitude in funding and managing his parish, Coughlin found himself deep in debt and desperate to keep his parish's doors open.[91] Coughlin turned to Leo Fitzpatrick, manager of a radio station and a devout Catholic, for free radio time "to fight bigotry and build up his church."[92] Armed with the Christian philosophy of Thomas Aquinas, Coughlin preached "pleasant discourses on the life of Christ and the lessons of the Bible" from 1926 to 1930.[93] He tended to emphasize the concept of a "just community" that consisted of responsible and virtuous citizens who held each other accountable for their actions. Gradually, Coughlin received increasing numbers of letters and monetary 'devotions' that not only paid off Coughlin's debts, but also ensured the future stability for his parish. These devotions would finance the expansion of Coughlin's parish, the relocation of Coughlin's parents to his parish, and the creation of the National Union for Social Justice (NUSJ).[94]

By 1930, one network estimated that nearly 30 million Americans tuned in every Sunday for his radio sermons.[95] Brinkley notes, "Coughlin received more mail than anyone else in

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[90] Brinkley, 85.
[91] Brinkley, 90-91: Instead of the "Radio Priest," Coughlin could certainly be named the "Capitalist Priest." From repositioning donation coffers to inviting the Detroit Tigers (and Babe Ruth) to mass, Coughlin sought to maximize the profitability and marketability of his small parish. In addition, Coughlin renamed his parish after a recently canonized saint, who was especially popular among American Catholics, and constructed a shrine to increase his parish's exposure.
[92] Brinkley, 90-91.
[93] Brinkley, 83.
[94] See Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion*, 116; Brinkley, 90-91.
[95] Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion,* 113, 115: By 1936, more than 70 percent of American households owned radios.

America – more than any film star or sports hero, more than the President."[96] The rising popularity of Coughlin's radio sermons fed directly into his ego and, as suggested by Brinkley, fostered a growing desire to further expand his audience and subject matter. Pope Leo XIII's 1891 *Rerum Novarum* and Pope Pius XI's 1931 *Quadregesimo Anno* provided Coughlin with the ideological ammunition to endeavor on this next step in his increasingly political path.[97] Pope Leo XIII presented the concept of "social justice" as reliant upon "a system of private ownership tempered by recognition of the individual's obligation to his community" that largely encompasses the nature of Long's Share Our Wealth Clubs.[98] Pope Pius XI's encyclical, considered a reaffirmation of Pope Leo XIII's work, emphasized the concentration of wealth to "those who 'control credit… and rule the lending of money,'" channeling the conspiratorial language of Watson and Bryan.[99] These Catholic calls to action oddly converged with *Populist* rhetoric and were similarly received with disdain from conservative circles in the US. Kazin's previously mentioned construction of Populist rhetoric, involving the combination of pietistic impulses and secular faith, is particularly useful in understanding the popular appeal of Coughlin.

Considered one of the most electric orators of his time, Coughlin captured his audience through impassioned, allusion-laden language that seamlessly transitioned from Biblical verses to economic figures. Brinkley highlights the novelty of the radio medium in national media and how Coughlin "was exploiting it at a time when… [it] was becoming central to the lives of American families."[100] After 1930, Coughlin's radio sermons and speaking events began to

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[96] Brinkley, 83.
[97] See Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion*, 116; Brinkley, 87.
[98] Brinkley, 87.
[99] Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion*, 117.
[100] Brinkley, 97.

explicitly identify and evaluate political issues and leaders with increasing ferocity. Considering radio network sensitivity to official government displeasure due to the freshness of and uncertainty surrounding the radio medium, CBS asked Coughlin to "tone down" his future broadcasts.[101] This event only emboldened Coughlin to discuss, in his first broadcast of 1931, radio censorship and free speech within the American political climate (implicating CBS throughout). For the remainder of 1931 and his contract with CBS, Coughlin's radio sermons shifted to questions concerning the Treaty of Versailles, the US's involvement in the Great War, and the country's future economic prosperity. The censorship fiasco only increased Coughlin's public exposure and popularity.

Founded in the same year (1934) as Long's Share Our Wealth Society, Coughlin's National Union for Social Justice (NUSJ) consisted of "an occupational cross section of Americans" that signified Coughlin's definitive entrance into politics.[102] Believed to be a vibrant, national political organization according to Coughlin's broadcasts, the NUSJ was essentially dead on arrival. Coughlin constantly attempted to consolidate power and control over the organization that quickly devolved into an array of neighborhood meetings.[103] Far less effective than Long's clubs, NUSJ chapters acted as an illusion of Coughlin's propensity to be a political threat. The failure of NUSJ and its newspaper outlet, *Social Justice*, should not discount Coughlin's influence or impact. It rather indicates the difficulty of developing a cohesive political organization around the contradictory elements of privacy and community within the larger context of Christian social justice. Coughlin retained his audience of 30 million followers through the strength of his *economic* message, not the cultural and communal complexities of

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[101] Brinkley, 99-100.
[102] Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion*, 121.
[103] Brinkley, 187.

social justice. The composition of NUSJ, despite its ephemeral presence, highlighted the absence of "Jews and other non-Christians, the speculative rich, and racial minorities."[104] Cowie emphasizes how minorities and women were similarly excluded from the gains in collective economic rights of New Deal reform; Coughlin's NUSJ aligns with Cowie's conception of the 'collective' in this instance.[105] Coughlin's harsh treatment of these out-groups eventually leads to his downfall, but Coughlin's popularity was certainly intact by 1935.

Demonstrating the strength of his message prior to 1936, a reporter once described a Coughlin crowd at Madison Square Garden as "a composite, living portrait of the American people – of all ages and of every class… roused from their lethargy and taking an active vital interest in the politics of their country."[106] Coughlin advocated for "'a just and living annual wage' for every family, 'the right' of unions to organize, and the government's corresponding 'duty… to protect these organizations against vested interests of wealth and of intellect,'" while also urging factory owners to "share the profits with labor" because it was "God's doctrine."[107] Similar to the bimetallism debate of the 1890s, Coughlin's bold proposal of abolishing the Federal Reserve and "establish[ing] a 'Government owned Central Bank'" sought to give individual citizens a sense of security and control *over* their money.[108] These vague and oftentimes unrealistic economic proposals fueled his popular appeal during the first half of the 1930s. From labeling the New Deal as "Christ's Deal" to warning listeners of "the God of Gold," Coughlin displayed a masterful ability to combine Christianity and economic strife. Coughlin described his writing process as:

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[104] Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion*, 121.
[105] Cowie, 28.
[106] Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion*, 121.
[107] Ibid., 121.
[108] Ibid., 120.

> "I write the discourse… first in my own language, the language of a cleric. Then I rewrite it, using metaphors the public can grasp, toning the phrases down to the language of the man-in-the-street… Radio broadcasting, I have found, must not be a high hat. It must be human, intensely human. It must be *simple*."[109]

The passage above clearly identifies elements of Kazin's construction of populist rhetoric, in which Coughlin is attuned to the need for religious appeals and a deeply human connection with his radio audience. Coughlin wished to position himself in the minds of Americans as a savior capable of guiding them to moral purity *and* economic security during a time of immense insecurity. This 1934 radio sermon exemplifies this claim:

> "Let me come to you as a priest of God, caring for no living politician, but caring only for your welfare – let me counsel you, let me direct you and inspire you towards the fulfillment of your legitimate and God-given aspirations."[110]

Coughlin developed an intimate relationship with his audience which only contributed to the size of his ego and perception of his political weight. Lacking the political sophistication of Long and an understanding of his political foe Roosevelt, Coughlin engaged in a political game that he never truly understood.

According to Kazin, the failure of Roosevelt's National Recovery Administration (NRA) to improve investor confidence and boost jobs spurred Coughlin's leap to political action with the founding of the Union Party in 1936. Borrowing the Abraham Lincoln's party name, Coughlin framed his party as engaged in civil war against "financial slavery" and vowed it would secure 10% of the popular vote.[111] I believe Kazin's narrative fails to account for the

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[109] Brinkley, 97.
[110] Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion*, 122.
[111] Ibid., 124.

impact of Long's assassination and Coughlin's own megalomania upon Coughlin's decision to cede his support of Roosevelt and create the Union Party. Brinkley considers each of these factors as vital to understanding Coughlin's rapid degeneration in the public eye. In the first few months of 1936, the Union Party enjoyed electoral successes in Ohio, Wisconsin, Michigan, Massachusetts, Maine, and Pennsylvania.[112] Much like the NUSJ's perceived strength, these victories were an illusion; the grand majority of candidates picked by Coughlin were incumbents or were facing weak opponents. Therefore, Coughlin's odd choices for the presidential ticket, North Dakotan Congressman William Lemke and former Boston prosecutor Thomas C. O'Brien, were destined to fail. Lemke, the presidential nominee and a second-term Congressman, failed to match the zeal and charisma of Coughlin, while also possessing little political capital or policymaking experience.[113] Coughlin acted as the primary campaigner for the Lemke-O'Brien ticket and sought to absorb other dissident parties and their leaders into his movement. Coughlin's degeneration accelerates during this period due to an ego-fueled rivalry with campaign ally Gerald L.K. Smith and, in part, a result of his electoral failure.[114]

As previously mentioned Smith was considered a highly intelligent and masterful orator, Coughlin often felt upstaged at numerous rallies by Smith's ability to energize the crowd in a manner that not even he could accomplish. At a Cleveland rally, an unhinged Coughlin delivered a scathing speech that shocked "even his warmest admirers."[115] Coughlin frantically labeled

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[112] Brinkley, 253.
[113] Brinkley, 254: According to Brinkley, Lemke developed an alliance forged in combat due to Coughlin's avid support for a Lemke-sponsored bill that sought to refinance farm mortgages and create major inflation of the money supply. Coughlin denounced not only Roosevelt, but also members of Congress who disapproved of the bill. One representative, John J. O'Connor of New York, directly challenged Coughlin to essentially a brawl in reaction his controversial statements.
[114] Brinkley, 256.
[115] Brinkley, 256.

Roosevelt "a 'betrayer,' a 'liar,' [and] a 'double-crosser.'"[116] During the speech, he removed his coat and clerical collar, "no longer the commanding priest, but an ordinary, sweat-soaked crowd-pleaser."[117] Coughlin's ego finally pushed the envelope too far for (most of) his supporters. As pro-Coughlin letters to Roosevelt's office evaporated, the Union Party secured just under 2 percent of the popular vote (892,378 total votes) and failed to receive enough signatures to be on the ballot in fourteen states, including New York and California.[118] Due to this poor performance, Coughlin disbanded the NUSJ and declared an end to his radio broadcasts, but to only return to the airwaves the next year.

Akin to the degeneration of Watson's rhetoric, Coughlin became a fervent anti-Semite upon returning to his radio sermons. He linked the bankers of Wall Street to the Jewish community through *Social Justice* publications of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion,* which "allegedly exposed an ancient Jewish plot to impose financial slavery upon the world."[119] The conspiratorial language of Coughlin echoes Watson's interpretation of the US's founding. Furthermore, Hofstadter's concept of the paranoid style also applies to Coughlin's decline. Hofstadter notes how the 'paranoid' grows increasingly frustrated as their "unrealistic goals" and "partial success" leaves them in a state of powerlessness in contrast to the immense power of their sinister enemy.[120] To illustrate the immensity of his foes, Coughlin published his own

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[116] Brinkley, 256.
[117] Brinkley, 256.
[118] Brinkley, 258, 260: The American Catholic Church began to openly denounce the activities of Coughlin by 1936; Coughlin's outright animosity to Roosevelt's administration further distanced voters from his negative and overzealous messaging. Those who did write in favor of Coughlin exhibited "bitter, hostile, nearly irrational" behavior and often presented Coughlin as a Christ figure.
[119] See Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion,* 131; Brinkley, 266.
[120] Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1963, 31.

editorials that spoke of "*communistic* Jews" and, on one occasion, plagiarized a speech by Nazi Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels.[121] Like Long, Coughlin was not a communist or an anti-capitalist despite their calls for leftist reform and wealth redistribution. Rather, he railed against the tyranny of "modern capitalism" and of a Communist hell.[122] De-emphasized by Brinkley to ease the pairing of the priest with the Kingfish, Coughlin expressed (early on in his career) a hatred of Communism that his radio audience tolerated, but did not necessarily invest itself in. His attachment of anti-Semitism to both the modern capitalist system and the backwardness of Communism facilitated Coughlin's sympathies with fascist ideologies and movements.[123] The formation of the anti-Semitic Christian Front in 1938 and Coughlin's urging of supporters to form "Platoons" further deteriorated Coughlin's public image.[124] With the advent of World War II and Coughlin's continued support of Nazi Germany, a coalition consisting of Jewish organizations, Catholic leaders, and the press ultimately pressured radio networks from accepting airtime for Coughlin. By May of 1942, Coughlin finally halted radio broadcasts and severed his ties with *Social Justice* upon orders from "Church superiors."[125]

Joseph McCarthy: A Responsive Establishment Upholds Political Decency in the 1950s

[121] Ibid., 266.
[122] Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion,* 119.
[123] Ibid., 130.
[124] Brinkley, 266-267: The Christian Front developed into a thuggish militant movement that even had a terroristic plot in 1940 to assassinate "Jews and Communists… and knock off about a dozen Congressmen."
[125] Brinkley, 268.

Kazin understands Coughlin's downfall as a function of his pursuit of "a bigoted and *premature* anticommunism" that failed to connect with Americans who were primarily concerned with their financial well-being and the security of their labor.[126] Fervent anticommunists failed to garner popular support during the 1930s and 1940s, despite using populist rhetorical strategies or embodying Hofstadter's construction of the paranoid style. The Great Depression centered economic issues as central to the livelihood of Americans, while World War II fostered the popular sentiment of a shared struggle between Soviet Russia and the US against the evils of the Axis powers. This is not to say Americans grew sympathetic to the communist system, but rather outright opposition to Soviet Russia was *unpopular* – even unpatriotic within the context of WWII. Americans remained opposed to the "evils of Communism [and] its potential dangers" throughout the 1930s, but they also did not believe it was a central threat to American life.[127] Populists enjoyed electoral and popular success through their collective economic messages, while cultural and prejudiced appeals tended to harm the political legitimacy of their platforms. Anticommunism acts as the vehicle for popular prejudice to inflate in importance for populists. A 1944 public opinion poll (presented below) reveals how Americans carried feelings of "friendship and suspicion" towards the Soviet state.[128]

With which of these four statements do you come closest to agreeing?	Percentage of Respondents
It is going to be very important to keep on friendly terms with Russia after the war, and we should make every possible effort to do so.	22.7
It is important for the U.S. to be on friendly terms… but not so important that we should make too many concessions to her.	49.2

[126] Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion,* 133.
[127] David M. Oshinsky, *A Conspiracy So Immense: The World of Joe McCarthy*. New York, NY: The Free Press, 1983, 91.
[128] Oshinsky, 95.

If Russia wants to keep on friendly terms with us… we shouldn't discourage her, but there is no reason why we should make any special effort to be friendly.	11.3
We shall be better off if we have just as little as possible to do with Russia after the war.	9.3
Don't know	7.5

Table 1: Public Opinion Poll Concerning Post-War American-Russian Relations

The subsequent trials of the Rosenbergs and Alger Hiss revealed the vulnerability of the federal government's national security apparatus, thus setting the stage for McCarthy and other anti-communists of his ilk. The Rosenbergs were indicted and executed for passing on information regarding America's atomic bomb project, while Hiss, an affluent government official within the State Department, was accused of similarly acting as a Soviet agent by a former Communist Party member. These trials fed the public's hysteria and anxieties towards Soviet Russia and the communist system. Furthermore, the Hiss case added substance to McCarthy's bold claim of a "conspiracy on a scale so immense as to dwarf any previous such venture in the history of man" because Hiss was considered to be the archetype of an exemplary American citizen who benefited greatly from the capitalist system of America. [129] Hofstadter offers numerous insights concerning the rhetorical strategies of popular (or reactionary) political actors that remain relatively consistent from the early stages of the republic to the twentieth century. According to Hofstadter, the paranoid style within the context of "right-wing thought" is built upon three basic elements: a sustained, policy-driven conspiracy to undermine free capitalism; top government officials consistently "sell out" American national interests; and a network of Communist agents controls "the whole apparatus of education, religion, the press, and the mass media… to paralyze the resistance of loyal Americans."[130] While McCarthy's paranoid style closely engages each of these elements, the paranoid style, more broadly, tends

[129] Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*, 7.
[130] Ibid., 26.

"to be [an] overheated, oversuspicious, overaggressive, grandiose, and apocalyptic" mode of expression.[131]

Hofstadter describes political actors that employ the paranoid style as concerned with a conspiracy "directed against a nation, a culture, a way of life whose fate affects not himself alone: but millions of others."[132] Yes, the People's Party wished to defend the existential security of the agrarian man and of rural communities, but Populists developed this defense through broad economic terms and messages. McCarthy, on the other hand, sought to defend the supposed foundations of American life through an emphasis on *cultural* and *political* difference with Soviet Russia and Communist sympathizers. McCarthy marks the blossoming of an American populism that taps into the political and cultural anxieties of Americans. The anti-elitism and anti-establishment features of American populism, exhibited by previously discussed populist actors, remains constant in McCarthy's rhetoric. McCarthy's identity and the short-lived success of his populism contributes to the racial component of American populism that will persist and proliferate into the twenty-first century.

During the 1950s, the emergence and acceptance of a "Judeo-Christian" tradition eased the accessibility of Catholics and Jews to engage in politics, while also consolidating the public's understanding of whiteness in relation to religious denomination.[133] Coughlin's focus on social justice and economic reform, influenced by Catholic doctrine, was not accepted by wealthy Protestants and others suspicious of the Vatican's support of socialist policies. McCarthy, a devout Catholic, emphasized his anticommunism through universal "truths" of being an American. He also plainly stated America's domestic situation as "a final, all-out battle between

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[131] Ibid., 4.
[132] Ibid., 4.
[133] Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion,* 168.

Communistic atheism and Christianity."[134] This melting of religious identity was still a delicate affair. References to Biblical figures or passages fade from American populism of the second half of the twentieth century. The general absence of religious imagery in McCarthy's rhetoric reflects the political reality of the time, while the quiet support of Catholic elites and institutions reveals the perceived importance of McCarthy's career in relation to empowering Catholics. By 1950, McCarthy's future political prospects were grim. Despite being a man who claimed "his only true support came from 'the people,'" McCarthy's rise to fame is a function of the political goals of both Catholic elites and right-wing Republicans.[135]

From losing the support of his Wisconsin constituency to being ignored by fellow senators, McCarthy needed to find "a reelection issue with 'some real sex appeal.'"[136] In a meeting with two other Catholic elites, Father Edmund Walsh, dean of Georgetown's School of Foreign Relations, suggested that McCarthy should pursue "Communism in government."[137] Oshinsky is skeptical to the level of influence Father Walsh and the other attendees had on McCarthy's attachment to anticommunism. However, this meeting shows how Catholic elites were invested in the political success of McCarthy. McCarthy did not necessarily satisfy *all* Catholics. Oshinsky admits that there were more pro-McCarthy Catholics than other Americans, but "the percentage of Catholics who registered strong approval of McCarthy, never rose above 21."[138] An important episode in McCarthy's tumultuous career exemplifies the strange divide between Catholic elites and the masses. The Catholic newspaper, *America*, criticized McCarthy's charges against the State Department in a 1952 editorial. After a public letter sent by McCarthy

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[134] Ibid., 186.
[135] Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion,* 186-187.
[136] Oshinsky, 107.
[137] Oshinsky, 107.
[138] Oshinsky, 306.

failed to stop *America*'s attacks, the Vatican stepped in. John Baptist Janssens, Father General of the Jesuits in Rome, ordered *America* to remove its editor and stop publishing pieces on "political and secular matters."[139] The Vatican's involvement in this fiasco and Pope Pius XII's marital blessing to McCarthy certainly indicate the value of McCarthy's platform in relation to the political future of Catholics in America.[140] Other groups also understood McCarthy as a transformative character in achieving certain political goals.

Right-wing Republicans similarly perceived McCarthy as an opportunity to advance their political ambitions; Kazin notes how "McCarthy was their best chance to close the gap between ideological conservatives and white working people (especially Catholics)."[141] This aspect of McCarthy's populism was also driven by elites. Conservative intellectuals, such as L. Brent Bozell Jr. and William F. Buckley Jr., consistently praised McCarthy, while right-wing Republicans in Congress silently supported McCarthy's anticommunist crusade.[142] As late as the summer of 1951, Gallup pollsters found that the majority of respondents identified the GOP as representing the "privileged few, moneyed interests, [and] big companies."[143] McCarthy's populist rhetoric connected with working class whites. He constantly railed against the affluent WASP-filled State Department with its 'experts' and 'bureaucrats,' who truly did not understand the average American. Increasingly, workers described themselves as a "regular guy, average

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[139] Oshinsky, 307.
[140] Oshinsky, 329.
[141] Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion,* 186.
[142] Oshinsky, 307, 478.: In *McCarthy and His Enemies: The Record and Its Meaning,* Buckley and Bozell defend McCarthy's attacks on Communism and disregard for political customs because he truly identified the severity of the Communist threat to the American political system. Unlike the distance Catholic elites created as McCarthy's career declined, Bozell and Buckley supported McCarthy to the end. For example, Bozell supplied McCarthy with a moderate opening statement for his hearing with the Censure Committee.
[143] Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion,* 186.

Joe… evoking an agreeable personality" rather than through phrases like "working man and Joe Worker" that evoked an economic position or political opinion. Aligning with this developing narrative, McCarthy constantly encouraged media outlets to "feature his lowbrow pursuits" and present him as "a tough-talking, crap-shooting, womanizing ex-G.I."[144] However, this image was not impervious to attack eventual censure; McCarthy did not respect seniority within the Senate and Congressional procedures. Similar to the Vatican's intervention, Richard Nixon acted as a sympathetic ally of McCarthy and attempted to prolong McCarthy's political survival. The political implications of McCarthy's success resonated with Nixon and other right-wing Republicans. In 1954, Nixon "advised Joe to drop his exclusive reliance upon the Communist issue and branch out into other fields," while also offering to provide him with "inside information about fraud and mismanagement during the Truman years."[145] McCarthy respected Nixon and accepted his advice, but McCarthy's reputation as an "unappeasable aggressor" and disregard for political allies made Nixon's breakthrough ephemeral in its effect. His knack for making political enemies across the aisle, and within the GOP, certainly complicated his future. McCarthy's eventual censorship through a *bipartisan* effort reflects the political strength of party elites and the level of respect for political decorum and procedures during this period. These institutional and party checks act as deterrents for populist agitators, while it also signifies a standard of decency that both parties maintain within the American political system. McCarthy's unapologetic and oftentimes blind mudslinging tarnishes his reputation and also simplifies his significance. Although I do not find Bozell and Buckley's account, *McCarthy and His Enemies: The Record and Its Meaning*, of McCarthyism compelling, I agree that McCarthy's outspoken

[144] Oshinsky, 57.
[145] Oshinsky, 360.

stance on questions of national security facilitated the improvement of the State Department's security apparatus. Oshinsky admits McCarthy uncovered the vulnerability of "the incredible laxity of existing security systems."[146] Although McCarthy's populism is limited in its goals and lifespan, it once again reveals the strength of American institutions (in this case, a bipartisan respect for Congressional procedures and norms) and how populism points to *real* problems that plague American democracy.

Another feature of McCarthy's anti-elitist rhetoric, McCarthy derided the policies of the State Department as "lace-handkerchief kind of tactics," while "the only kind of tactics the Communists understand… [are] lumberjack tactics, bare-knuckle tactics."[147] The presentation of the State Department as an elitist stronghold that works against the will of the American people is consistent with Hofstadter's observation of right-wing populism being centered around precisely this conspiracy. Rather than attacking economic status of State Department officials and political opponents, McCarthy targeted individuals' education and their lack of exposure to everyday Americans. During several televised hearings, McCarthy coupled "severe charges… with a seemingly guileless humor and informality" to connect with the American public.[148] He also charismatically discredited the intelligentsia of the State Department by confusing their names with convicted Communist spies and describing experts as out of touch with the realities of Communist threat.[149] Due to McCarthy's precarious position as a Catholic and right-wing Republican, his populist message needed to be attuned to the social climate of working class Americans to garner appropriate popular support. The emergence of the Judeo-Christian

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[146] Oshinsky*,* 308.
[147] Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion,* 188.
[148] Ibid.*,* 187.
[149] Ibid., 186, 188.

tradition, in conjunction with the popular success of McCarthy's non-exclusionary rhetoric, reveals how American populism and its success is reliant upon the populist actor's construction of the "other" through terms that are either socially acceptable, permitted, or considered popular by the American public. McCarthy's rejection of anti-Semitic language and positions emulates this assertion.

As shown through the anticommunist rhetoric of Coughlin and Gerald L.K. Smith, anticommunists referred to Communism and its agents in highly anti-Semitic language. McCarthy is an exception. Oshinsky asserts that McCarthy purposefully filled the majority of his staffer positions with Jews to "convince people… [he was] not anti-Semitic."[150] To offset the public endorsements from rabid anti-Semites (namely, Smith), McCarthy's choice of Roy Cohn, a twenty-five-year-old Jew, as his chief counsel demonstrates a change in the characteristics of American populism. This aspect of McCarthy's career is particularly revealing because it furthers Kazin's claim of a societal acceptance of a Judeo-Christian tradition in American society. More importantly, the absence of explicit anti-Semitism in George Wallace and Donald Trump's political careers supplements my claim that successful American populism, following McCarthy's brand and the outcomes of the civil rights movement, necessitates a toleration of predominantly *white*, Judeo-Christian identity.

Despite McCarthy's inclusion of Jews, Wallace's public embrace of the Jewish community, and Trump's expressed support of Israel, this anti-Semitic faction is tied to populist appeals along broader political and cultural issues. Even as McCarthy's popularity waned, anti-Semitic supporters continued to contact broadcasting stations labelling any opponent of McCarthy as "a 'bleeding-heart pinko,' a 'pet of the *Daily Worker*,' a 'dupe of the Kremlin,'

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[150] Oshinsky, 254.

[and] a 'Jewish bootlicker.'"[151] McCarthy's Jewish inner circle was not spared either. According to Oshinsky, "letter after letter McCarthy's own supporters complained about Cohn and Schine (assistant counsel) in particular – their draft records, their arrogance, their 'Jewishness,' and their wealth."[152] Coughlin's final remnants of supporters consisted of these anti-Semitic, oftentimes militant Americans. Sustained populist power and success within the American context is reliant upon one's ability to retain an agitated and economically insecure white base of followers. American populism's anti-Semitic tradition and its subsequent fading from the rhetorical strategies of populists indicates a relationship between the prevalence of select prejudices within the American people and the political viability of prejudiced filled rhetoric in populist movements. The successes of the civil rights movement during the 1950s and 1960s simultaneously expanded the makeup of the American "people," while also constraining the reach and construction of American populism in the latter half of the twentieth century. The 'collective' part of populist economic appeals remains rooted in the demographics of New Deal beneficiaries, but the popular prejudice aspect of populism, entering the 1960s, is increasingly defined by racial and cultural difference.

George Wallace: Cultural Cleavages Breathe Life into Right-Wing Populism in the 1960s and 1970s

Much like McCarthy, Wallace carefully crafted his image to resonate with working class Americans. Wallace's college classmates commented on how he, despite living in relative financial comfort, would consistently present himself as a "poor country boy working his way

[151] Oshinsky, 399.
[152] Oshinsky, 428.

through college."[153] When enlisting in the army during WWII, Wallace purposefully "avoided the officer track… because he knew that voters who had been privates and corporals would always outnumber the erstwhile captains and majors."[154] During his bid for a circuit judge position in 1952, Wallace constantly reminded voters of his time as a sergeant, while his opponent, State Senator Preston Clayton, derided Wallace's following as cadres of 'rednecks.' Wallace won the district with three-fourths of the vote. [155] By initially allying himself with former Governor Jim "Big Jim" Folsom, Wallace learned "the nuts and bolts of building a following" and honed his skills as a political operative.[156] Folsom regularly used colloquial language, described by Carter as "folksy platform rapport," to connect with his rural, uneducated base of voters.[157] In political debate and on the campaign trail, Folsom remained on the offensive in his rhetorical approach, in which he used a kind of "country sarcasm" to charismatically attack his opponents and offhandedly deflect the criticisms of the opposition.[158] This mode of communication not only proved to be effective in disarming protesters and political adversaries throughout Wallace's political career, but it also emanated a sense of charm and respectability that would ultimately improve Wallace's national character, especially with Northern audiences. While in Washington D.C., the Kingfish of Louisiana also used this tactic to infuriate fellow senators and Roosevelt's administration. Long elevated his public image and perceived charisma through his radio broadcasts. Considering Long's authoritarianism, the strategic usage of charm can distort the public's understanding of a populist's principles and intentions. Martin Luther

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[153] Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion,* 229.
[154] Ibid., 229.
[155] Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1995, 79.
[156] Carter, 81.
[157] Carter, 82.
[158] Carter, 82.

King Jr. understood Wallace as "the most dangerous racist in America today" because of his "artful" manner and presence in communicating racist doctrine to distressed whites.[159] The depth to which Wallace was attached to hate groups and other 'ultra-right' elements in America is astounding; it must be noted to demonstrate the prevailing populist trend of prejudiced forces being a component of populist appeals and demands.[160]

Throughout Wallace's political career, he maintained strong connections with Alabama's White Citizens' Council and other white supremacist organizations. However, Wallace's relationship with these organizations is largely a result of the efforts of his chief speech writer and founder of a Ku Klux Klan chapter – Asa Earl Carter. Often credited for Wallace's "snappy, hard-hitting speeches" during his 1962 gubernatorial bid, Asa Earl Carter provided Wallace with the bedrock of rhetorical phrases and colloquial language that would characterize his messaging for over two decades.[161] While campaigning for Wallace at KKK rallies, Asa Earl Carter oversaw numerous instances of hate crime and violence at the hands of his followers. Individuals, such as Carter, were central to Wallace's campaign efforts. Initially formed in 1963, Wallace's inner circle consisted of a collection of Southern politicians and businessmen who "all were closely associated with the White Citizens' Council movement; all were fanatical white supremacists."[162] These veterans of radical right movements offered Wallace extensive political networks with energized organizers that he would ultimately nurture for his 1968 presidential

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[159] Carter, 156.
[160] Carter, 296: Carter notes the use of the term, "ultra-right," by liberal activists and its lukewarm reception by intellectual and elitist circles. These "sophisticated Americans seemed uncertain whether to be horrified or amused;" this reaction parallels the emergence of the alt-Right in the American political sphere.
[161] Carter, 106-107.
[162] Carter, 201: Interestingly, wealthy Louisianan oil magnate, Leander Perez, held close ties to the Long political machine, while right-wing columnist John Synon constantly invoked the Red-baiting rhetoric and paranoia of McCarthyism.

bid. Dan T. Carter admits, "It seemed an unlikely brain trust for a man with secret national political aspirations."[163] Despite the condemnation of this coalition by liberal circles, it was incredibly successful in its fundraising efforts. Carter writes,

> "More than eighty percent of the nine million dollars raised by the campaign came from small contributions of less than fifty dollars, solicited by the increasingly slick direct-mail fund-raising techniques of televangelists and, more important, by fund-raisers where Wallace was present to press the flesh."[164]

The sheer number of small contributions indicates the strength of Wallace's populism among working class individuals, while the radical right's grassroots networking and fundraising reveals the prejudiced component of his platform.

In contrast to the populists of the first half of the twentieth century, McCarthy and Wallace did not need to create a comprehensive communications network to spread their message. Their one-liners and energetic personalities constantly headlined publications across the country. McCarthy routinely invited reporters to his office on Capitol Hill and his private residency for 'exclusive' interviews, while Wallace's Southern charm and lively performances captivated both reporters and working class whites around the country. Wallace also benefited from the grassroots efforts of the previously mentioned white supremacist coalition, thus preserving campaign funds for other purposes. As McCarthy continued to distance himself from potential political allies, reporters eventually began to reject his interview invitations.

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[163] Carter, 201.

[164] Carter, 335, 337: Even among wealthier, potentially 'problematic' donors, Wallace's campaign staff emphasized smaller donations to veil the source of campaign contributions. The White Citizens' Council raised a quarter-million dollars, but managed to conceal the source through more than three hundred individual checks. This tactic shows the delicate co-existence of the economic and prejudiced appeals of Wallace's platform in relation to electoral support.

Newspapers increasingly positioned stories concerning McCarthy to the back pages. Wallace, on the other hand, successfully kept the spotlight upon himself and the pleas of white working class Americans.

Similar to the media's attention of Trump during and after the 2016 presidential election, Wallace received relentless and, more importantly, *free* press coverage at every stage of his political career. During a speaking tour in 1963, Wallace received over eight hours of television programming and "dozens of newspaper and magazine articles generated by the 370 reporters who had appeared at scheduled news conferences."[165] The media outlets regularly attacked Wallace's character, physical appearance, and even his wife. In late September of 1968, *Life* magazine, *Times*, and *Newsweek* all featured Wallace in cover stories that "struggled to come up with new words and phrases to condemn the candidate."[166] The negative coverage paralleled Wallace's "politics of rage," as Carter coins it, that focused on the deteriorating state of law and order through highly negative and derogatory terms. Positivity failed Wallace in his first gubernatorial bid. In 1958, Wallace emphasized "improved roads, better education, and industrial recruitment – along with a more dignified defense of segregation."[167] Wallace's subsequent defeat revealed to him the power of the 'race question' in Alabaman politics. Wallace vowed, "no other son-of-a-bitch will ever out-nigger me again."[168] In response to a reporter's question concerning foreign policy, Wallace replied, "I don't need a foreign policy… All [the public] wanted to know about was niggers… and I'm the expert."[169] As his national figure inflated, Wallace began to tone down his racist rhetoric; however, Carter contends that Wallace

[165] Carter, 200.
[166] Carter, 343.
[167] Carter, 95.
[168] Carter, 96.
[169] Carter, 138.

continued to use highly discriminatory language in private. Wallace deliberately fueled the frustrations and prejudices of the white working class through his rhetoric, while the media's insults seemingly validated Wallace's conspiratorial charges against:

> "'the so-called intelligentsia,' the intellectual snobs who don't know the difference between smut and great literature… [and] the 'briefcase-carrying bureaucrats' who 'can't even park their bicycles straight.'"[170]

Accompanying his attacks against the federal government and the courts concerning desegregation and busing, Wallace frequently invoked the names of Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson in a similar fashion as populists previously discussed.[171] Rather than focusing on economic inequalities and philosophies, Wallace railed against the political legitimacy of judges "not even elected by the people" and the supposed expertise of federal bureaucrats.[172]

In Alabama, Wallace established his political dominance through his ownership of the segregationist cause. At the national level, he touched upon white *resentment* towards antiwar protesters and blacks to support his presidential bids. Wallace recognized the public's growing loss of faith in the federal government due to developments in welfare reform and rising rates of crime. Wallace compounded these two issues to energize his campaign efforts and to specifically target working class whites. In regards to the allocation of federal funds to those living under the poverty line, Carter highlights the economic reality of Americans during the 1960s and Wallace's scapegoating of poor blacks. Carter writes,

> "For the years between 1961 and 1968, aggregate income for whites increased fifty-six percent, while the total for nonwhites went up 110 per cent… During that same period,

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[170] Carter, 425.
[171] Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion,* 231.
[172] Ibid., 231.

> the federal government transferred approximately $121 billion to individuals living below the poverty line, with over thirty percent of those funds going to black Americans. Had poor and middle-income white Americans retained that amount, it would have added less than three-eighths of one percent to their disposable income; but that was not the public perception in the 1960s."[173]

The distortion of economic realities is not new to American populism, but the manipulation of these realities to 'other' blacks, by an infamous segregationist no less, suggests economic identity is secondary to racial identity within this context. The crime issue further illuminates this differentiation from the economic populist appeals of the past. With "every index of criminality showed an increase in the number of crimes against property and in crimes of violence," Wallace keyed into anxieties surrounding law and order – even Nixon and Hubert Humphrey attempted "to play catch up on the crime issue" in regards to Wallace's messaging on the issue.[174] By combining issues of law and order with antiwar and civil rights protests, Wallace masterfully created a greater *culture* war that the likes of Patrick Buchanan and Newt Gingrich would tap into during the 1990s. Within Wallace's framework, the 'collective' aspect of populist economic appeals is constrained to Cowie's interpretation of the beneficiaries of New Deal reform (white, working class men). Constant shifts in Nixon's campaign strategies in both 1968 and 1972 indicate the power of Wallace's message and the level of mobilization within working class communities.

Thomas Sugrue and John Skrentny's essay, *The White Ethnic Strategy*, identifies Nixon's deliberate strategy to prod the growing "politics of ethnic resentment" within the South and

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[173] Carter, 348.
[174] Carter, 348.

Midwest.[175] As reflected in his surprise successes in Wisconsin, Wallace's scapegoating narrative attracted urban white ethnics and simultaneously fragmented Democratic support throughout both the South and Midwest, thus ripe for political gain. Through rhetorical games regarding busing and housing integration and (unintentionally) affirmative action, Nixon "reinforced the redefinition of white working class identities in ways that fostered a *cultural* difference" in order to bring more voters into the Republican fold.[176] This development in political messaging is absolutely central to understanding the significance of Wallace in relation to the American political system. At the close of the 1972 election, Nixon admitted that Wallace's exit from the race "made it possible for him to build a 'New American Majority' on the solid foundation of the conservative South."[177] Much like Long's assassination, it seems that another instance of divine intervention halted a possible populist crusade out of Wallace. Due to the impact of Wallace on GOP strategy and the mobilization of select voting groups in the South and Midwest, Carter rightfully describes Wallace as "the most influential loser in twentieth century American politics."[178] Gingrich ultimately strengthens the political importance of and further polarizes the populations that Wallace attracted.

Under the leadership of Gingrich during the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Republican Party's fundraising and political training organization, GOPAC, strengthened the financial support for conservatives running in state and local elections, while also providing a platform for Christian Right and far-right elements (that had once supported Wallace) within the conservative

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[175] Thomas J. Sugrue and John D. Skrentny, "The White Ethnic Strategy." In *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s*, 13-28. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008., 180.
[176] Sugrue and Skrentny, 192.
[177] Carter, 450.
[178] Carter, 468.

movement to gain power. Gingrich viewed himself as "a 'big tent' Republican who served as a bridge between conservatives… and moderates."[179] Geoffrey Kabaservice notes the success of Gingrich's control of the party:

> "The 1994 election is most notable for marking the Republican breakthrough in the South. While Southern states had already been voting for Republican presidential candidates, this was the first election since Reconstruction in which Democrats lost their Southern majority. The South would become the nation's most reliably Republican region, and its distinctive form of conservatism increasingly would dominate the GOP."

However, Gingrich's highly partisan rhetoric drew from Wallace's divisive narrative and Nixon's intentional agitation of that narrative. 1994's "freshman class" of Republican representatives, on the surface, demonstrated a reassertion of economic conservatism and a hold over a new conservative base, but the far-right elements of the party, perpetuated by Wallace's campaign tactics, became emboldened. Nearly "two dozen or so 'True Believers' in the freshman class harassed Gingrich constantly on his right flank, pressured him into some of his worst errors, and eventually led to his undoing as Speaker."[180] Entering the 1990s, Wallace's messaging acted as the foundation of the GOP's reorientation of its messaging and would eventually characterize the nature of populism, emanating from the political Right, into the twenty-first century.

Cut from the Same Cloth: Polarized Populists in 2016

[179] Geoffrey Kabaservice, Rule and Ruin: The Downfall of Moderation and the Destruction of the Republican Party, From Eisenhower to the Tea Party. Cary: Oxford University Press, 2014.
[180] Kabaservice.

A populist's ability to connect with the "economic citizenship" of working class whites is central to understanding American populist appeals because both Trump and Sanders mobilize this voter group. Due to Trump's inconsistent policy positions (especially in regards to foreign relations) and disregard for political decency, it is difficult to imagine that Sanders and Trump hold any similarities between each other. However, *The Atlantic*'s Molly Ball notes the myriad of shared policy positions between the two populists in January of 2016:

> "both oppose the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade deal, both support maintaining or expanding current levels of Social Security benefits, both support some upper-income tax hikes, both lament the pernicious role of money in politics, both opposed the Iraq war and believe the money spent on it could have been put to better use domestically, both have been known to worry that increased immigration could depress working-class wages, both have supported single-payer health care, and both have flip-flopped on gun control."[181]

These beliefs are often at odds with elites of both parties. Trump and Sanders certainly point to real problems that taint fundamental democratic principles in the US. Consistent with the key roots of populism, both Sanders and Trump maintain anti-elitist and anti-establishment rhetorical strategies expressed through grassroots campaigning and fundraising. Kazin ties Trump to a more insidious strain of populism, in which he taps into the "racial nationalism" of voters.[182] Trump's divisive and xenophobic rhetoric aims, much like that of past populists (i.e. McCarthy, Wallace), to reject the status quo of political correctness and relative inclusivity in American politics. The rise of Trump and Sanders during the 2016 primaries is fueled by their willingness

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[181] Molly Ball, "Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders Actually Have a Lot in Common." The Atlantic. January 07, 2016.
[182] Kazin, "Trump and American Populism: Old Whine, New Bottles," 2.

to hold economic issues at the forefront of their rhetoric, but Trump's eventual success can be attributed to his embrace of the *cultural* populist demands formed in the 1960s and 1970s. First, I wish to begin with Senator Sanders.

Hillary Clinton's coalition of party elites and multi-national corporations oddly echoes the moneyed interests of William McKinley's presidential campaign in 1896. The Democratic National Committee's (DNC) collusion with the well-financed Clinton campaign clouded the potential electoral support of Sanders's grassroots campaign and the media's perception of his platform. The Democratic Party's ballot-stuffing and voter intimidation tactics during state and congressional elections of the 1890s reflect not only the extent to which party elites will curb populist appeals, but also the political fallout of undemocratic means to achieve political stability and victory. Zealous Populists refused to support, and avidly campaigned against, the 1896 fusion ticket of Bryan-Watson due to these past instances of voter suppression.[183] The DNC's perceived 'selection' of Clinton certainly dissuaded moderates from "Crooked" Hillary, while disillusioned working class whites, attached to Sanders's anti-elitist platform felt that they were truly duped by Northeastern elites and faceless corporate suits.

Sanders distanced himself from and diluted the identity-driven narrative of social justice advocates within the Democratic Party. Evidenced by the lack of diversity of both his campaign senior staff and his personnel while senator, Sanders did not seem preoccupied with questions of race and social justice. Protests from activist groups, such as Black Lives Matter, readily attacked Sanders for these personnel choices and his unwillingness to explicitly consider identity politics.[184] To access this elusive white working class, Sanders offered a nuanced approach to

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[183] Goodwyn, 308.
[184] Jesse Byrnes, "Clinton Ally: Black Lives 'don't Matter Much' to Sanders." The Hill. January 22, 2016.

engage questions on cultural difference and unrest. For example, Sanders stated that Americans must "'fight to bring more and more women into the political process, Latinos, African Americans, Native Americans,' but that they also need to be 'candidates who stand with those *working people*.'"[185] Long also performed this strategy to appeal to Louisianan blacks and Northern audiences. Considering this connection to Long, leftist claims that Sanders only perpetuates racial prejudice and injustice, I believe, are valid. Drawing from Cowie's understanding of collective economic citizenship – secured during a time of segregation and exclusivity, Sanders's populism is indirectly tied to the anti-democratic features of American populism and its tradition of perpetuating prejudice. Considering Ta-Nehisi Coates's perspective of the centrality of race in the 2016 election, the populism embodied by Sanders and Trump is in touch, in varying degrees, with racial bias and prejudice. As evidenced by the tumultuous Wallace campaigns and the increasingly polarized political environment of today, American populism necessitates an outright, or unspoken, rejection of *minority-driven* social justice reform and rhetoric to garner popularity. Sanders's use of rhetoric further ties him to the populists of the past.

Harkening back to the rhetoric of the People's Party and populists of the 1930s that targeted international bankers and money changers, Sanders railed against "the top one percent" and highlighted the "crumbling infrastructure" and "rigged economy" of the US.[186] Huey Long's Share Our Wealth Plan and the bimetallism of the People's Party similarly align with Sanders's calls for wealth redistribution and a fair economy. As previously discussed, the popularity of

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[185] Clio Chang, "No, Bernie Sanders Didn't Ask His Supporters to "ditch" Identity Politics." The New Republic. November 21, 2016.
[186] Adam Barnett, "How Bernie Sanders Uses Rhetoric to Make Americans Support Left-wing Ideas." New Statesman. May 17, 2016.

Long throughout the country (though strongest in rural areas) parallels Sanders's reception nationally with 57 percent of voters viewing him favorably in May 2017.[187] According to Matt Karp of *Jacobin*,

> "Sanders stands against unpopular things. For over twenty-five years, about 60 percent of Americans have consistently said that the country's wealth distribution is unfair and that the wealthy pay too little in taxes. In the past decade, an equally robust 60 percent majority has expressed dissatisfaction with the size and power of major corporations. Another 60 percent believe major donors exert far more influence on Congress than regular people."[188]

Monetary issues and the concentration of wealth are *popular* subjects. Corporate America, presented as an inflated and oppressive force, is constructed as the conspiratorial center of Sanders's paranoid style. This economic message ties Sanders to the American populist trends of the first half of the twentieth century, but the impact of his populist appeals upon the American political system is unclear. The People's Party incited legislative victories for farmers during the 1900s and 1910s, while also calling into question the rule of law concerning campaign finance. Long threatened Roosevelt's administration from the Left, thus fostering a robust Second New Deal that sought to strengthen the 'collective' economic security of Americans. In an increasingly polarized political environment, one may speculate that Sanders added fuel to the ideological fire of American politics. Trump only further complicates the possibility of effective democratic recovery in the country due to his inflammatory, culture-accented rhetoric.

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[187] Jonathan Easley, "Poll: Bernie Sanders Country's Most Popular Active Politician." The Hill. June 09, 2017.
[188] Matt Karp, "The Popular Populist." Jacobin. October 18, 2016.

Sanders's humility and life as a career politician complicates his attachment to Hofstadter's paranoid style, while Trump's sporadic insults concerning illegal immigrants and the political swamp of Washington D.C. more closely relates to Hofstadter's concept. Hofstadter recognizes a transition in the paranoid style's choice of rhetoric from the 1900s to the 1950s. According to Hofstadter, right wing populists explicitly attack "eminent public figures" rather than a focus on combatting "shadowy international bankers."[189] Trump, on the other hand, successfully encompasses both of these rhetorical strategies. Through explicit charges against state officials and public figures on Twitter and at his rallies, Trump draws upon the rhetorical strategies of McCarthy and Wallace, while his characterization of illegal immigrants as "rapists" and "drug dealers" mimics the People's Party and New Deal populists' practice of generalizing social ills through eye-popping phrases. Trump's use of Twitter to directly speak to the world oddly echoes Father Coughlin and Huey Long's exploitation of the novel radio medium. Political scientists and commentators alike continue to grapple with the impact of Trump's tweets upon not only public sentiments, but also upon foreign relations and the American economy. His lackadaisical announcements of policy decisions, such as the banning of transgender service members and the firing or hiring of cabinet officials, is unprecedented.[190] However, Trump's reactionary tweets reflect the erratic planning behavior of Wallace and the rhetoric of an unhinged Father Coughlin on the Union Party's campaign trail.[191] According to staffers and reporters, Wallace was considered a "human machine of spontaneity, a non-planner who habitually waits until the last minute before giving his supporting cast the cue."[192] Trump

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[189] Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics,* 24.
[190] Jessica Estepa, "We're All Atwitter: 3 times President Trump Made Major Announcements via Tweets." USA Today. March 13, 2018.
[191] See Brinkley, 256; Carter, 299, 340.
[192] Carter, 299.

similarly embodies this characteristic through his 'improvised' speeches and rage-filled tweets. The constant shuffling with Trump's White House communications department demonstrates the hectic and unpredictable messaging of Trump in relation to political strategy and basic standards of professionalism.

The 2016 Republican primary indicated a failure of Republican leadership to coalesce its candidates under a conservative, yet moderate nominee that could disassociate the GOP from the radical right. Trump's rhetoric, specifically regarding immigration, preyed upon cultural anxieties and propped up the political platforms of the far-right and its ilk. The emergence of white nationalist agitators, such as Steve Bannon and Milo Yiannopoulos, in Trump's campaign management, the White House, and media outlets signified a developing allegiance to far-right elements of conservatism that fundamentally oppose the inclusivity of the American democratic experiment. Relying upon the White Citizens' Council, John Birch Society, and other detestable organizations for grassroots fundraising and campaigning, Wallace similarly benefited from this sector of American society.[193] However, Trump also benefited from the gradual endorsements of respected politicians within the GOP and the donor lists and resources of the Republican Party to support his presidential bid. Trump's successful campaign demonstrates the power of populist demands and the deterioration of political decency within the GOP. In "Donald Trump is the First White President," Coates situates the election of Donald Trump as a reaction to the Obama presidency and as an indicator of the prevailing wind of white supremacy in the country. Coates derides numerous scholars and journalists for seeking to appease the white working class and nurture to their needs, while also ignoring the pleas of minorities – blacks in particular.[194] The

[193] Carter, 201, 295-296.
[194] Coates, "The First White President."

tying of white nationalism and nativist rhetoric to the Republican Party leaves moderates and establishment conservatives in a precarious position concerning the future of the GOP; however, Trump's tax bill is an encouraging instance of cooperation. Coates identifies the populist appeal regarding prejudice all too clearly. Trump voters "had a higher household income ($81,898) than those who did not ($77,046)," while his strongest support came from whites "making $50,000 to $99,999."[195] The latter statistic reveals that the bulk of Trump's support is not necessarily working class citizens. The ethno-nationalism and the exploitation of popular prejudices, suggested by Kazin, seems to play a role in the formation of Trump's voter demographics.

The collective economic message is no longer the primary thrust of American populism – the use of popular prejudice has gained a true foothold in mainstream American populism. Instances of mass action, such as the Women's March and the March for Our Lives, demonstrate the potency of American democracy. Over the past year, the electoral victories of Democratic candidates in Alabama, Virginia, and New Jersey suggest that not only has the Democratic Party improved its messaging, but also that populist appeals possess an ephemeral nature in the minds of Americans. From each of the historical cases considered in this paper, one can see the short lifespan and deflating political relevance of American populists and how the democratic establishment responds to these potentially subversive appeals. Time will tell how both political parties will respond to these populist actors, but I am certainly confident in the strength of our democracy and its principles. It is increasingly difficult to be optimistic within this absurd political environment, but I would say: the history speaks for itself.

[195] Coates, "The First White President."

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